



Uzma Aslam Khan's Thinner Than Skin and Prospects for Aesthetic Appreciation



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Abstract: *The present study argues that the novel Thinner than Skin is not intended to be read as a depiction of the beautiful scenery of northern Pakistan. Instead, the beauty of the landscape's surface masks the bleak/painful reality beneath. As a result, aesthetic issues in Thinner than Skin revolves around whether or not the underlying sufferings that contradict the sublime should be taken into account when appraising the creative worth of works of fiction. When reading the story from Schopenhauer's point of view, this lends new meanings and an existential difficulty to the aesthetic beauty of the aforementioned locations.*

Key Words: Thinner Than Skin, Pakistani Anglophone Fiction, Aesthetics, Schopenhauer

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Introduction

Following the events of September 11, 2001, and its worldwide consequences, debates on literary aesthetics have been dramatically pushed down to incorporate contemporary political developments in a variety of art and literature disciplines. The challenge is whether we can separate literature from aesthetics under the impact of various ideological, political, and business actions, as well as time. To answer this question, we must first revitalize an earlier concept of aesthetics in literature.

Aesthetics in literature might refer to the usage of references to artistic components or

expressions within a narrative, and investigated by employing literary characteristics such as imagery, and symbolism, as well as the utilization of objects, people, and locations to represent greater ideas. On the whole, the movement's manifesto seems to be devoted to the development of a view that, when working with the arts, one should emphasize the importance of striving for beauty, imagination and cultivating taste. My goal here is to increase readers' grasp of the theoretical issues involved in literary aesthetics for the creation and appreciation of Pakistani fiction. In addition, I intend to examine the question of literary aesthetics in

terms of creativity, meaning, and practical aesthetic implications in Pakistani fiction. And emphasize aesthetic components such as the work of art, the audience, and the society in which the artist and the readers live.

Without opposing the belief in literature being an aesthetic subject, I wish to demonstrate that it is not as simple as it appears. To begin, I want to establish that the discussion along aesthetic lines does not necessitate reductive readings of literature or aesthetics. To the environmentalist for instance, environmental aesthetics is based on the idea that any environment - natural, rural, urban, large or modest, ordinary or spectacular - has a lot to see, hear, feel, and appreciate aesthetically. The world's various surroundings are just as artistically rich and satisfying as works of art. Interestingly, Bakhtin strongly entrenches food, and merriment in aesthetic debates. Likewise, we must also determine and observe how literary texts have progressed beyond the reductive imaginative notion of beauty to capture evolving social realities. As Sherri Irvin explains, in recent decades, there has been a change away from an exclusively art-focused perspective and toward an appreciation for the continuity between fine art experiences and those from other spheres of life. This movement has spawned a new sub-discipline known as "everyday aesthetics" or "the aesthetics of the ordinary." Theorists of everyday aesthetics often assert that things and activities that are not primarily associated with art or nature can have aesthetic features and/or produce meaningful aesthetic experiences.

As a result, aesthetic analysis can be applied to almost any aspect of life. Then it must be deciphered along a number of different lines of reasoning. The first is the cultural value of literature. In the Renaissance, the culture responded more directly to the imaginative cultivation of men's and women's lives in a relatively

straightforward manner. We can discern the same temper in interpreting Pakistani English poetry from the progressive school. However, the current phenomena, especially the rise of modern Pakistani English Fiction necessitates a more nuanced reaction to culture, in which language, style, and narrative method must all conform to modernist and/or postmodernist complexities of determinism and indeterminacy, respectively. As a result, aesthetics must move beyond the traditional stance of the text's creative strength to include representations of social realities, modernism and postmodernism complexities of culture and human existence. Adorno's debates on aesthetics are crucial here: As (Edgar argues, 1990), Adorno constructs a sociologically oriented aesthetics based on Hegelian dialectics, which must recognise the dialectical argument that works of art are both products of specific social processes and include truth content that is independent of society, thereby making art critical of society.

The dialectical argument suggests that the social and the aesthetic are both identical and non-identical. Examining the three content elements can help to flesh out the identity. He also includes the techniques or technology used to work it, an identity between those productive forces used in artistic activity and those used in non-artistic activity may be suggested. Third, it is proposed that construction rules reflect current logical forms in society. A critical aspect in deciphering aesthetics from a modernist or postmodernist perspective is that both reject in their own ways the traditional orientation aestheticism in the classical sense. Also see Berleant, Arnold. "Reflections on the Aesthetics of Violence." *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)* 7 (2019): 7.

However, the aesthetic aspect must be removed from the haze of creative perception of beauty and subjected to the consistent

shifts that occur along the path of literary innovation in order to be effective. The creation of the magical realism/surrealist impression is a perfect example of how literature uses imaginative structuring to produce elements of strangeness, wonder, and the merging of fact and fantasy (see Maggie 2004).

Aesthetics in Pakistani Fiction: A Critical Review

Writing, and more specifically fiction, has been at the forefront of Pakistan's literary scene ever since the 1990s. It has also become a recognized forum for representing Pakistani culture, traditions and history, and the majority of the credit for this goes to the Pakistani writers who live abroad. Literary voices of Kamila Shamsi, Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohammad Hanif, Hanif Qureshi, Nadeem Aslam, Danyal Moenudin, Qaisra Shiraz, and Uzma Aslam Khan have done an excellent job of effectively showing how postcolonial factors like cultural conflict, displacement, hybridity, and migration to the urban region have influenced the literary creations (see Kanwal 2015). Nonetheless, it is essential to understand the ways in which the works of these authors are impacted by, react to, and interact with the concerns of aesthetics. The purpose of this essay is to evaluate works like Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Thinner than Skin* from the standpoint of Schopenhauer's philosophy of aesthetics.

Arthur Schopenhauer's views on aesthetics and the human experience of violence have left a lasting impact on philosophy and art (see Shapshay, 2012). Schopenhauer's philosophy emphasizes the role of aesthetic experiences in providing a temporary escape from the pain and suffering of everyday life, yet he also acknowledges the inherent violence of the world and the struggle of individuals to find meaning within it. This article explores the complex relationship between aesthetics and

suffering/violence, drawing on Schopenhauer's philosophy as a lens to examine the ways in which aesthetic experiences can both reflect and transcend violence in our lives (for aesthetics and violence see Sheehan, 2013; Berleant, 2019): 7.). Through an analysis of Schopenhauer's views on violence and its connection to aesthetic experiences, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the role that art and beauty play in the human experience of suffering and transcendence.

For the overall analysis of Pakistani English fiction, the question of aesthetics is important. But, since there has been a lack of discourse on the topic, the reader's individualistic responses to the aesthetics of the fiction have the final say. My chapters in the volume have concentrated on the fiction's political, ideological, and theoretical views. As a result, a space has been created for debating the aesthetic merit of these works, particularly in light of Schopenhauer's views on what constitutes aesthetics in literature.

To begin, it is necessary to place our consideration of Pakistani English fiction within the context of the aesthetic value of our Urdu literature. In its broadest sense, the topic involves a wide range of aesthetical concerns relating to emotions, representation, pleasure, entertainment, beauty, imagination, ethics, and the judgment of taste. In this instance, Urdu poetry takes the lead and leads us on a recurring basis to the imaginative cultivation of emotions, beauty, and romance. (Sumbul Nasim 2019).

In general, Pakistani English fiction, like any other literary work, is characterized by a creative drive to (re)create human agency and predicaments in the face of adversity. In addition, some works, such as those by Uzma Aslam Khan aim to recapitulate history through myth and the development of human civilization from the past to the present time period. Kabir, for instance,

argues how Uzma Aslam Khan's novels *Trespassing* (2003) and *The Geometry of God* (2008), make use of a sophisticated symbolic machinery based on prehistory, geography, myth, and history. Khan delineates deep geography for Pakistan as a form of emotional and symbolic rerooting, drawing on the fossil-rich terrain of northern Pakistan and the Arabian Sea shoreline in the south. This deep geography, connected to local resources of yearning and passion, offers an alternative to Islamicist self-fashioning tactics for being a "true Pakistani." This process of rerooting must be viewed as a response to the upheavals and migrations of 1947 by a post-Partition era of Pakistani cultural creators. By analysing it, we might refocus Partition Studies on modes of explanation for the Pakistani link between memories, forgetting, and remembering (Kabir 2011).

Uzma Aslam also continues to combine traditional and modernist aesthetics in her work. In telling the history of the Andaman Islands in her latest fiction *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*, Uzma Aslam Khan's goal is to describe eighteenth-century colonial occupation as an ignored part of postwar historiography. It's worth paying attention to, as it is critical to assessing postcolonial historical fiction and its (re)dependence on history and truth, history and power (particularly in conjunction with aesthetics of fact and fiction. The portrayal of the fauna and flora of the islands, together with the characters' beliefs in myths and sympathetic social relationships that bridge beyond ethnic and religious divisions, provide some of the imaginative reconstruction of the time. Then, lyricism seems to assert aesthetic value in many fictional narratives. Nadeem Aslam in particular is regarded as one of the most lyrical novelists of his generation, drawing on imagery and words to elicit distinct emotional states such as fear, love, violence, and religious convictions.

Surya Khan also needs to be mentioned here as her novel articulates the connection between history, memory and individual action in a creative fashion. In her three novels (including "Noor" in 2003, "Five Queen's Road" in 2009, and "City of Spies" in 2013), Sorayya Khan is concerned with the complex interplay between memory and history. Each of these novels, as Bandana Chakrabarty argues, uses history's violence as a subject matter. In the first book, it is the Bangladesh liberation war, in the second book, the partition of India, and in the third book, it is the American presence in Pakistan. Further, she prefers to put individual actions and the reasons behind them in the spotlight, rather than on traditional chronological history (Chakrabarty, 2017). In her study, the author (Ishtiyaque 2015) explores the historical and textual nexus between memory and history, examining the change in the study of personal memories of national events as it becomes part of the nation's collective memory. The examination of the novel also shows how the personal trauma in 1971 penetrated into and beyond a person. As a result, the imaginative richness of the novel is diffused into the texture of the narrative.

Similarly, the imaginative layout of *Home Fire* juxtaposes myth with reality in a compelling manner. The work, which is based on the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, combines a traditional tale of betrayal and sacrifice with current concerns of tension in familial ties, male/female sexuality outside of marriage bonds and women's individuality concerning her dress codes (the hijab) and sacrifice. The most compelling aspect of fiction has to do with how our awareness is being digitized as a result of media and technology. This is a remarkable achievement since it extends the aesthetic area to include the technical and media worlds. *Home Fire* and *Runaways* take the initiative and call attention to the fact that our consciousness is currently dominated by the media. In *Home Fire*, the dependence is

between the terror network in Syria and the media. Basing the narrative on media reports concerning the use of technology by terror organizations, Shamsie narrates how terrorist groups have recently demonstrated a better and more effective use of modern media to spread their message. a message of fear and often to indicate that if policy and behaviour toward the terrorist (or those they purport to represent) do not change, more such terrorist actions will follow" (228).

Quite differently, Janet Wilson analyzes contemporary fiction including *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* with reference to its "affinity with the "traumatological" aesthetic of the post-millennial, 9/11 British novel". RF in this context, "shows the increased suspicions and anger prompted by terrorist attacks as conducive to the psychological state that motivates terrorist activities". She particularly writes about reverse profiling to describe east-west polarization, Wilson argues the way reverse profiling is enacted here in the narrative to emphasize the East-West divide. So, while Changez does not appear to be a terrorist and has not allegedly executed a violent act, he gradually appears (through his stereotypical Muslim male appearance with a beard, dark hair and eyes) to be one as he gestures curiously to persons surrounding them who may be his colleagues. This article contends that the novel *Thinner than Skin* is not about the stunning landscapes of northern Pakistan. Instead, the landscape's superficial beauty conceals a harsh and brutal reality. Therefore, *Thinner than Skin's* aesthetic concerns centre on whether or not the hidden pains that run counter to the sublime should be factored into assessments of a work's value as art. The visual beauty of such places takes on new significance and an existential challenge when viewed through Schopenhauer's lens.

Thinner Than Skin and Question of Aesthetics

The present study articulates that the novel

Thinner than Skin is not intended to be understood as a description of the gorgeous terrain of northern Pakistan. Instead, the landscape's surface beauty conceals the bleak/painful facts beneath. As a result, aesthetic questions in *Thinner than Skin* revolve around whether or not the underlying sufferings that contradict the sublime should be considered when judging the artistic merit of works of fiction. This adds fresh interpretations and an existential difficulty to the visual beauty of the aforementioned places when reading the novel from Schopenhauer's point of view.

Arthur Schopenhauer's views on aesthetics and the human experience of violence have left a lasting impact on philosophy and art (see Shapshay, 2012, Schopenhauer's philosophy emphasizes the role of aesthetic experiences in providing a temporary escape from the pain and suffering of everyday life, yet he also acknowledges the inherent violence of the world and the struggle of individuals to find meaning within it. This article explores the complex relationship between aesthetics and suffering/violence, drawing on Schopenhauer's philosophy as a lens to examine the ways in which aesthetic experiences can both reflect and transcend violence in our lives (for aesthetics and violence see Sheehan, 2013; Berleant, 2019): 7.). Through an analysis of Schopenhauer's views on violence and its connection to aesthetic experiences, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role that art and beauty play in the human experience of suffering and transcendence.

Schopenhauer's account of natural beauty has an ambiguous stance towards the value of the satisfaction involved in suffering reduction. He describes the experience of natural beauty positively as it provides relief from personal suffering, but also implies that it distracts us from the world's suffering as genuine aesthetic experience withdraws us from all suffering. His critique of the

aestheticist approach to natural beauty draws attention to this deficiency, where attention is exclusively fixed upon resonant textures, colours, and shapes. This deficiency also arises within the universalistic consciousness of genuine aesthetic experience, where both modes of aesthetic experience inhibit empathizing with the suffering of other sentient beings as their subjective content is thin, and their approaches are object-centred.

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, believes that the sensory impressions created by a presentation of beauty should not be regarded as a whole or deemed exhaustive. The philosophy of Schopenhauer may lead one to highlight the importance of the buried reality, which contrasts with the surface glitter. We don't have to divide them; we may accept them as independent locations and/or merge them as a hierarchical movement from the surface to the depths. As a result, he poses a "question" regarding interpreting the surface value of the beautiful as a whole, and he draws attention to the underlying contradiction that the externally beautiful conceals the gloomy interior reality of pain and misery.

Schopenhauer, as (Robert Wicks [2010](#)) argues, criticizes the aestheticist approach to natural beauty, which emphasizes the positive aspects of beauty and its ability to provide pleasure, as it fails to reveal the world's suffering intensely enough to foster empathy. Schopenhauer distinguishes between representation and will and argues that natural beauty, being a representation, is limited in its ability to provide a deeper understanding of the world's suffering. The genuine aesthetic experience of natural beauty also has limitations and can only provide a rudimentary level of wisdom. Schopenhauer believed that to achieve a more profound level of wisdom, moral and ascetic awareness, and empathy are required. The shortcoming of even genuinely aesthetic experiences of natural beauty is the limited

kind of wisdom they offer.

The same line of thinking is built on in this essay, which claims that the novel is not meant to be read as a depiction of the stunning landscape of northern Pakistan. Instead, the superficial attractiveness of the region and landscape hides the bleak/painful truths beneath. Therefore, aesthetic issues in *Thinner than Skin* centre on whether or not the underlying sufferings that contradict the sublime should be considered when assessing the aesthetic value of works of fiction. This reading of *Thinner than Skin* from Schopenhauer's point of view adds new meanings as well as existential dilemmas to the aesthetic beauty of the aforementioned regions.

Aesthetics in Thinner than Skin

Khan deviates from the prevalent narratives about politics in *Thinner than Skin*, focusing on the relationship between the environment and human predicaments. Humans and nature here are inextricably interwoven. Nature has characteristics of beauty that appeal to human sensory sensibilities, causing us to admire it. Moving beyond this, Khan tends to craft a narrative where ecological disaster and oppression of marginalized communities are intertwined. An important environmental perspective is taken up by this author on the massive deforestation in northern Pakistan and the native opposition to this escalating violence in the region. The timber mafia's systematic clearing of forests and the collaboration of corrupt forest authorities are two of the primary causes of the steady rise in deforestation in the northern lowlands. As violence disturbs human existence in Pakistan, a number of other social processes are taking place that do harm to both the environment and people. The Gujjar tribe, a migrant underclass depicted in Khan's writings, is an example of the displaced migrant population that Khan depicts through the lens of fiction. Furthermore, it

provides a glimpse into the life of subordinate populations that cannot be disregarded because they serve the affluent at home. As the author illuminates the ecological and physical traumas experienced by Pakistani society's lowest sections, this is a standout component of the story.

Aesthetic concerns in the novel will be explored along the following questions:

- How can the juxtaposition of the beautiful, the sublime, and the dismal or gloomy in *Thinner than Skin* be argued within the context of Schopenhauer's aesthetic philosophy?
- What impact will the above reading have on the general comprehension of current Pakistani fiction?
- How may it assist in separating traditional readings of Pakistani English literature from a postcolonial perspective?

The last question is in my view very interesting because as Ashcroft argues, "Aesthetic theory has often been regarded with suspicion by postcolonial theorists who see aesthetics as implicated in the canonical marginalization of postcolonial literatures" (Ashcroft, 2013, 410).

Juxtaposition

Khan's ability to blend beautiful and brutal with harsh ways of existence that need harsh decisions is on full display in the novel. The stunning scenery in the novel is inspired by the natural beauty of Northern Pakistan, which is home to mountains, massive glaciers, valleys, and rivers. With dreams of making it big in the United States, Nadir, a Pakistani photographer, travels to the country's northern areas and provides a pictorial overview of the area's less-visited sites. He has done an excellent job of capturing the mysterious and fabled beauty of Pakistan's landscape. The story takes the reader on an adventure with the protagonists as they explore the Kaghan Valley. Native

Pakistanis from the Gujjar ethnic group in the country's northern region provide insight into the challenges faced by mountain nomads. Images of "mating glaciers" and "mating ice," which represent the unrivalled raw beauty of the northern highlands, the northwest queen of the mountains, Malka Parbat, and the shores of Lake Saiful Maluk, emerging from the snow-melted ice.

Furthermore, it is important to see how the author has utilized art to demonstrate how catharsis comes from nature, not as a normal backdrop or framework, but as a more dynamic function that demonstrates the relationship between nature and human sexuality, imagination, and mental processes. A catharsis is an emotional release that can make you feel better morally or spiritually while also reducing worry and tension. The first chapter of the novel contains a thought-provoking passage about the dominance and cathartic effects of nature, as well as the northern regions of Pakistan, where every natural creature and feature, such as wind, mountains, glaciers, birds, lakes, valleys, and trees, are alive, in contrast to nomads and immigrants. The novel's body consists of a collection of interrelated tales. They all breathe and behave in accordance with the author's inferences from the surrounding natural environment. In addition, the author's personal life experiences are given in the text as a result of having lived in a number of locations, similar to the novel's protagonists. "In the distance, a murky mist encircled Naked Mountain's doppelganger. Was it possible that the clouds arranged themselves just so [...]. Fire falling into honey." Here, the author depicts the twilight beauty of northern regions, where clouds cover the mountains as garments cover the body and the arrangement of clouds creates layers like mirrors on top of mirrors, luring him in and causing him to reject it. In his imagination, a mystical vision arises, and he concludes that this must be what paradise looks like. The true advantages of nature are

purity and purification, and you may experience happiness without weeping. Therefore, reading such a lovely work has a therapeutic impact on the reader, who may empathize with Nadir's predicament. The imagery created in the reader's imagination when water is compared to golden light and fire to honey has a therapeutic impact. Khan has the ability to make nature appear mystical, and her creative approach enhances this effect. The reader experiences both catharsis and pleasure from one chapter to the next.

However, the ecological purity of Pakistan, which is found in the Himalayan valleys, has been severely disrupted by the politics of war, commerce, and terrorism in the north of the country. Native nomads and their ancient way of life are presented as an antithesis to the complications of contemporary society. It has been widely believed that the Himalayas and Karakoram provide a natural barrier against everything from air pollution to deforestation. However, the walls have become porous, leaky, and hazardous, endangering the lives and futures of many people who have lived in that beautiful setting for decades. Nadir and Maryam, the novel's protagonists, reveal various elements—mountain beauty versus fear and death, indigenous culture versus sedentary lifestyle, geography versus environmental history of the region, and ecosystem versus its destroyers—that create a dual image.

The proposed debate tries to probe how Khan reconciles these contradictory worldviews and reveals hidden facts about the unfolding catastrophe in what were previously thought of as the world's purest alpine regions. Khan's writing, however, demonstrates her skill in contrasting such splendour with pain, mourning, and struggle, and for their unflinching analysis of the horrors endured by nomads, herders, and indigenous people in their pursuit of a sense of belonging, identity, and justice. While

Trespassing delves into the Indus valley of Thatta and the Arabian coastline, land, and human-animal relationship, *Thinner Than Skin* transports us to the breathtaking lush forests of Pakistan in the valleys of Gilgit Baltistan, a region steeped in pagan myths, stories of fairies and jinn, and local cultures that date back to the pre-Islamic era.

The novel alternates between two stories: one focuses on American and Pakistani-American visitors who come to Pakistan's northern regions to shoot the region's natural beauty, and the other follows the nomads of the region, who are the territory's original residents. Through this parallel structure, the author draws contrasts between the mechanical and artificial metropolitan lifestyle and the holistic and sustainable way of life of the indigenous population. Khan alludes to the mentality of ubiquitous instrumentalization via the character of Nadir, the photographer. This attitude can be seen in the way that Nadir views the female body as well as the natural world, which he views as mountains, glaciers, and meadows. Nadir is a slave to his camera rather than to reality, so long as it allows him to see these items as beautiful and significant.

Conceptually, *Thinner than Skin* is a captivating narrative about identity and belonging. It is also a love story between a young Pakistani man who wants to establish a name for himself as a photographer in America and the daughter of a Pakistani father and a German mother who was raised in the United States and wants to travel to a land she has never visited. Together, they travel to Pakistan, where they meet a young nomad who irrevocably alters their life and the lives of others around them. The work is also an ode to the wilderness, glaciers, and ancient Silk Road of Northern Pakistan, as well as the nomadic lifestyle of the region's inhabitants, who are a mixture of Pakistanis, Uzbeks, Russians, Chinese, and Afghans.

Using traditional storytelling techniques, Khan's novel evokes nature through aesthetic

depictions of lakes, winds, mountains, and fireplaces, which reflect the voices and complex emotions of her characters, and the novel's tightly woven plot illustrates her concern for the homeland, a crucial issue for the majority of migrants. In a time when culture, nature, and landscapes have been distorted in the bulk of Pakistani-English publications, Khan's viewpoint on depicting the Pakistani environment as a sanctuary of beauty, dense with greenery and a variety of trees, is significant and needs recognition. This work highlights the significance of natural landscapes and beauty in the lives of not only residents, but also foreigners and visitors, and urges people to value and appreciate aesthetics, making their surroundings a pleasant and lively place to reside. Likewise, it highlights the significance of the Himalayas and the Kaghan Valley, whose beauty has inspired poets, musicians, painters, filmmakers, and photographers for millennia. Nadir and Farhana, the novel's two main protagonists, are important to the plot. Nadir, a Pakistani nature photographer known for his particular interest in landscape photography, currently lives in America and is struggling with his identity when he is requested by government representatives to submit an offensive image of Pakistan. They inquire, "Where are the beggars and bazaars that mirror your culture?" rather than admiring the Northern views that were previously documented. (Khan 12). Khan's portrayal of the magnificent landscape of Pakistan on the one hand represents an equilibrium with the aesthetic of romanticism. But there's also the opposite side. To be sure, natural beauty may be haunting and spiritual, but it also hides a sorrow that draws attention to the human tragedy in light of cultural ideals and the "grand game" of power politics, and war under an apparent campaign to combat terrorism, radicalism and militancy. Hence the need to see it in the farmwork of Schopenhauer's philosophical views on aesthetics.

The dynamics of nature consciousness are built around the character of Maryam. Throughout the story, she appears to be so nature-conscious that she looks to be nature herself; her connections with animals, water, wind, birds, stars, and even Ghafoor, make her appear to be nature herself. Her depiction of nature's beauty is magnificent, and it creates a vivid image in the reader's head; similarly, her description of Ghafoor's appearance, which is related to the mountain tunnel, air, cloud, and door, has a positive influence on readers. She compares him to a message because she is madly in love with him and can't wait to meet him; this intensity affects the readers' senses. As a result, travelling around and living a nomadic lifestyle provide her with life experience. Her sense of location is so powerful and condensed that she knows and responds to nature; as a result, the audience is more vivid and visually appealing when the story is given via her.

In addition, while the description of Saif ul Maluk and her mysterious character is good on its own, the tale behind the lake makes it much more compelling in the context of the narrative. The incorporation of natural elements into the story elevates the aesthetic value of the text, and as a result, the reader is drawn to the settings that are set in natural environments. The natural setting is vividly portrayed, and its details are woven into the story at various points. As her awareness of the feelings and activities of the environment increases, the landscape's expressions and behaviours become clearer.

Using Emily Brady's criteria of "imaginative engagement", one could use imagination, engagement, and aesthetics as a foundational pedagogy that looks at the relationship between aesthetic consciousness and imagination, perception, nature, and text. Also, knowing a lot of places gives you the strongest sense of place connection because it gives you points of reference for making comparisons, which leads to

awareness and a deep sense of place connection. All of Khan's characters, including Nadir, Farhana, Maryam, Kiran, and Ghafoor continue to move around northern places in a way that makes the reader feel like he or she is on an adventure with them. Maryam is sensitive to the world around her, and she keeps wandering along the lake's edge and talking about her past. Nomadic people seem to have a long history with these areas. They are mesmerized by the lake, but the Himalayan mountains, the river Kunhar, and the lush green trees around these mountains also bring them peace and happiness.

One of the narrator's impressions is Malika Parbat, the mountain that surrounds the lake "Saif-ul-Maluk." It is also stated that the beauty of glaciers was enhanced when individuals glided along as though on fairy wings (47). These references concentrate on the aesthetic response to natural objects that can only be offered when the beautiful item is perceived and explored with wide-ranging concentration. It's a Malika Parbat formed by melting snow. It gives a cathartic image for the readers to convey the calming effects of the river, and its pure water reflects Farhana's reflection. Khan speaks to the power of imagination once again when it is influenced by aesthetic engagement.

The novel also depicts that these parts of beauty not only appeal to the five senses of the observer but also give these things a chance to be their ultimate blessings. All over the novel, glaciers, rivers, and mountains become sources of catharsis, imagination, and stories about nature that strengthen the power of imagination. At different times, these glaciers also cause snowpack and streamflow. The readers are drawn to their beauty through the particle oratory model of aesthetic experience, which Brady remembers not only as "seeing as," but also as "involving the self in natural scenes."

The portrayal of glaciers is painted in such an enigmatic way that the recipient

seems to be not simply seeing through but also part of those magnificent glaciers. "I sought solace by immersing myself in the valley's numerous enigmatic legends. The one that preoccupied me most was the legend of Kaghan [...]. They presented her with extravagant presents and requested her assistance in keeping jealous jinns away from their homes and romantic relationships (Khan, 2018, 165).

Furthermore, it is the combination of pleasure-seeking interpretation and imagination that allows for acceptable or improper delineation, as well as the use of metaphorical language to characterize that magnificent valley as being full of "fairies and princes" (Khan 298). Therefore, in the narrative, imagination and perception coexist. Similarly, the novel's mountain views demonstrate the novel's limitless imagination. As Nadir states, these mountainous zones create a vista that brings the sky closer and spectators closer to the sky. Khan says, "I thought I could grip them in my nail." (302). These lines show the enthusiasm of the writer and her positive imagination, which creates a good atmosphere for the narrators. Khans represent the river in their own unique way, like Hunza. The river's sound was different from that of the ultra-valley's water, and the waters were flowing in curves. Continuous concentration, self-indulgence, and the ability of the recipient to envision clearly are what allow them to distinguish the sounds of a river from those of a lake. The same skill of imagination can also bring to mind the sight of stars.

Brady's four dimensions of imagination, exploration, projection, amplification, and revelation give a brilliant response to aesthetics and keep the viewer from giving an irrelevant response. Khan's narrative has a natural aesthetic element that improves the viewers' perceptual imagination, aesthetic engagement, and sensory perception so they can appreciate visual aesthetics. Pakistan has

a lot of natural beauty, which Khan's characters have looked into and talked about using all four of Brady's imagination skills.

After describing the stunning scenery of giant glaciers, the author shifts gears and expands the scope of her narrative to include incidents involving drone attacks, military training camps and vehicles, terrorist groups, and bombing in the valleys. The tale emphasizes how military and terrorist organizations threaten the ancient heritage and natural balance that give the valleys their beauty. The author tells us about the militants who have dedicated their lives to the holy war against Sunnis in the valley (254), as well as the police and military who are actively searching for them. The valleys and woodlands are of little use to either faction save as locations for temporary training camps.

The issue of ecological misuse runs with the narrative's description of territory and a feeling of place, with the glaciers' traditions, gifts, surprises, and dangers. Khan focuses on a specific type of environmental degradation in Northern Pakistan: deforestation, and human insecurity, all of which can be easily related to art via modern aesthetics. Desertification and deforestation are major environmental concerns that she discusses in her novel, in which she integrates real-world and societal difficulties with her art. The core methods, however, fluctuate depending on region and nation. Today, biodiversity and forests are under threat in Pakistan, and Khan's awareness of the issue strengthens her message. This vital issue is conveyed by Mariam and Ghafoor, two major tribal nomads in the story, and it is through them that the reader realizes the scale of environmental concerns in Northern Pakistan. As a result, deforestation and biodiversity loss are two key indicators of environmental violence in the novel: "Was their aim to flood his skies with jets next?" Was it Kashgar or Kashmir this time? Afghanistan or Andijan? It was bad enough

that they'd been destroying the forest for as long as he could remember. They were now breaking into people's homes as well including Maryam" (211).

As a result of large-scale tree cutting for logging, this component of environmental abuse represents a severe economic setback for the valley's native communities. Because he "would not allow the wood mafia to down trees near his residence, just those further away," the forest ranger is a co-conspirator in the crime (p.206). Deforestation in the Himalayan valleys has severe economic effects; on the other hand, forest loss reduces water retention, increases soil erosion, and has other negative consequences. Ghafoor, a local village elder and one of the novel's primary characters, muses about his valley's diminishing environment and the herders' living conditions, "If there was one thing, he had learnt in his years away, it was that nomads were regarded much the same everywhere," Khan continues. The Kazakh cattle breeders were to Kazakhstan and, in the past, to the USSR what the Uyghurs were to China. Furthermore, the Afghan Uzbek herders—how terribly they did under both Russia and the Taliban. Shepherds around Pakistan were in a similar predicament (p. 206).

Furthermore, Khan is clear about how the seasonal life of Pakistan's shepherds is in danger, especially in the north. The narrator's comparisons to oppressed groups like the Uyghur in China, Kazakh cattle breeders, and the Uzbek in Afghanistan and Russia paint a sad picture of tyranny and deep marginalization, revealing the plight of all Pakistani shepherds. Like the economy that surrounds them, these cultures and ways of life are subservient to pastoral enjoyment and life, which is vulnerable to environmental damage. She talks about how and why sheep in mountain valleys are in such a tough spot. They are about to have a social and economic collapse. Before the British Raj, the Rajas and princes who lived in the hilly areas had free

access to forests and grazing lands. "The British colonial rulers left us a legacy of exploiting the land and making money off of it," Mariam's mother told her daughter as she carried her on her back. Wood and grass for thatching used to be easy to find.

The Impact and Significance of the Postcolonial Interpretation

Postcolonial literature has mostly been interpreted along the dual epistemologies of contestation and acceptance. Aestheticism is a less debated area in postcolonial theory and criticism (for some available studies on aesthetics and postcolonial literature, see Boehmer [2010](#); Moslund [2015](#); Ashcroft [2015](#)). Aesthetics in the postcolonial debates as Ashcroft argues has mainly served the

purpose of colonial marginalization of the colonized literary expression. Based on Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetics*, Ashcroft contends that aesthetics is principally a capitalist project of installing the bourgeois subject as a universal human". (411). Thus "aesthetics was an essential component of the discourse of exclusion by which post-colonial writings were kept out of the orbit of the beautiful and good characterizing English literature" (411). The study of aesthetics in the novel might go a long way in introducing a new mode of textuality where the postcolonial authors are in the process of setting new modes of contestations to the colonial hegemony as well as embarking on a new mode of literariness of postcolonial textuality,

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